

WHAT ARE OTHER HEALTH CONCERNS?

- **Liver disease:** The risk of cirrhosis and other alcohol-related liver diseases is high for both women and men, but higher for women.
- **Impact on the brain:** Excessive drinking may result in memory loss and shrinkage of the brain. Research suggests that women are more vulnerable than men to the damaging effects on the brain of excessive alcohol use.
- **Impact on the heart:** Studies have shown that women who drink excessively are more at risk than men of damage to the heart muscle.
- **Cancer:** Liquor consumption increases the risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, liver and colon. The risk of breast cancer increases as liquor use increases.
- **Sexual assault:** Binge drinking is a risk factor for sexual assault, particularly among women in higher education settings. Each year, about one in 20 women at higher education institutions are sexually assaulted. Research suggests there is an increase in the risk of sexual assault when liquor is consumed.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT LIQUOR ABUSE?

Both parents and educators can play a role in the prevention of liquor abuse. Research shows that children whose parents talk to them about alcohol use and abuse are far less likely to drink.

HELPFUL CONTACTS

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| The Department of Trade and Industry | 0861 843 384 |
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BINGE DRINKING & ALCOHOL ABUSE



The National Liquor Authority (NLA) is a structure within the Department of Trade and Industry (**the dti**) responsible for the administration of the Liquor Act No. 59 of 2003. One of the objectives of the Act is to reduce the socio-economic and other costs of alcohol abuse by regulating the manufacture and distribution of liquor.

INTRODUCTION

Communities rarely understand the dangers of and health risks associated with drinking and the abuse of liquor as well as the laws regulating the liquor industry, i.e. in South Africa, it is illegal to drink if you are under the age of 18.

In South Africa, liquor is the most socially acceptable recreational drug. In fact, it is often considered not to be a 'drug' and, therefore, not harmful.

Research shows that the consumption of alcohol at harmful levels is increasing, particularly among the youth. The prevalence of alcohol use among the youth has increased over the past decade, with average of first use being 13 years. Much of this drinking takes the form of 'binge drinking'.

WHAT IS BINGE DRINKING?

Binge drinking is a term widely used to refer to the act of drinking heavily over a short period of time or drinking continuously over a number of days or weeks. Some common definitions of binge drinking include:

- Drinking to get drunk – i.e. going on a 'bender'
- Occasional bouts of heavy drinking
- Intermittent or irregular episodes of excessive drinking
- Overindulges at frequent intervals

IS BINGE DRINKING HARMFUL?

Binge drinking can be harmful for a number of reasons:

- It can be immediately and directly harm your health
- It can expose you and others to the risk of injury or even death
- It can have a long-term impact on both your health and wellbeing

WHO SHOULD TAKE PARTICULAR CARE CONCERNING LIQUOR?

- People who have certain health conditions, such as chronic hepatitis C and cirrhosis of the liver
- People taking certain prescribed medications; i.e. methadone, which is used as a pain reliever as part of drug addiction detoxification and maintenance programmes
- People with a family history of alcohol-related problems
- Women who are pregnant
- Anyone who is about to undertake activity involving physical risk or a degree of skill, such as driving, flying, water sports or utilisation of heavy or farm machinery.

WHAT ARE THE SHORT-TERM EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH BINGE DRINKING?

- Hangovers, headaches, nausea, shakiness, possible vomiting and memory loss
- People are more likely to indulge in risky behaviour, such as swimming, driving, unsafe or unwanted sex, and verbal or physical abuse
- The risks of harm such as falls, assaults and car accidents

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF BINGE DRINKING?

- If someone drinks heavily over a long period of time, they can become physically and psychologically dependent on alcohol. Long-term use of alcohol can result in brain and liver damage;
- Drinking can become more important than other activities and may lead to problems at work, unwanted pregnancy, shame or embarrassment, feeling vulnerable and out of control while intoxicated, losing friends or loved ones as a result of your behaviour and loss of valuable items;
- One could suffer the risk of developing emotional problems, such as depression; and
- Financial losses through reckless spending on liquor or having to take time off work to recover from a binge.